

Most of Muscadets from Sevres-et-Maine

The environs of the city of Nantes in France's Loire Valley is home for Muscadet.

From the mouth of the Loire River on the Atlantic Ocean, the vineyards spread inland along 72 miles of the river's length and encompass three appellations: Muscadet, Muscadet de Sevre-et-Maine and Muscadet des Coteaux de la Loire.

Eighty-five percent of all Muscadets, originating from about 30,000 vineyard acres, are made from the appellation, Sevre-et-Maine. The origin of the name is two small rivers, the Sevre and the Maine, southeast of Nantes.

Research for the name "Muscadet" reveals that long ago half truth. Some authorities say that the wine took its name from the muscadet de Bourgogne grape variety. Others say that the wine is called Muscadet because it can have a musky aroma.

We don't believe either of these is correct. The grape variety for Muscadet production is the melon de Bourgogne, called pinot blanc in the United States. The wines of the region are definitely not musky.

In the region, wines are fermented and aged in large concrete vats or

stainless steel tanks — that's correct, no wood. Once fermentation completes, the wine is left sur lie (on the lees) during the fall and winter months until it is bottled in early April.

THE LEES ARE the precipitates resulting from fermentation. They are composed principally of dead yeast cells. Wine in contact with the lees remains fresh and unoxidized while gaining body. This is similar to the way champagne gains its character by remaining in contact with the sediment in the bottle before it is disgorged.

If you research the literature on Muscadet, you can find statements such as "Muscadet is a light, fresh wine with distinctive fruit, which gains nothing by being aged." Or "Muscadet is not a wine to keep."

Authors of such statements must never have tasted good Muscadets, such as those produced by Louis Metaireau, with three-to-five-year bottle age.

Louis Metaireau et Ses Vignerons d'Art is a group of winemakers each owning their own vineyards. In 1972, they collectively purchased a 68-



focus on wine Eleanor and Ray Heald

acre vineyard, the Domaine du Grand Mouton. By joining their capital and labor, they created a professional partnership which is unique to this day in Muscadet and in all of France. Yes, in a sense, it's a cooperative, but one with self-imposed discipline to bottle and sell only the best wine from its members.

In the heart of Sevre et Maine, Louis Metaireau and his associate winemakers annually produce about 83,000 cases. After a rigorous tasting process, only about 40 percent of this wine earns the honor of being labeled "Louis Metaireau."

BEFORE GOING to market, the wines of the associate members and the Grand Mouton estate are blind tasted and ranked in January after the harvest and again in September,

a year after harvest. "Poor wines are KO'd by the group," contends Metaireau. "Each grower accepts the collective verdict." KO'd wines go anonymously to a negociant for blending.

This selection process is the key to Metaireau's fame. "It gives each vigneron (winegrower) the incentive to make the best possible Muscadet," maintains the energetic Metaireau.

Wines that pass the selection process are bottled by the individual vigneron and sold under the Metaireau label. Each vigneron indicates which wines come from the art of his hand by stamping his initials on the corks.

Three Louis Metaireau wines are currently available in the Detroit area. They are wines to accompany

WINE SELECTION OF THE WEEK

1987 Cuvée "LM," Louis Metaireau (\$10.50). LM stands for Louis Metaireau and his personal selection from the vintage.

The sur lie bottle bouquet is evident over pear-like and citrusy fruit. The oak nuances are from the wine saw oak. Superbly elegant and complex, this wine will make you a fan of Muscadet with fresh, poached salmon and a light, freshly prepared mayonnaise.

seafood, shellfish or seafood terrines.

The 1988 Cuvée "One" is the best cuvee from the 1988 rigorous vigneron blind tasting. At \$12.25 per bottle, it is probably at least twice the price of some other Muscadets you can find. But remember, these lower-end wines might contain a few of Metaireau's KO'd cuvees.

It showcases pear and apple fruit

aromas and flavors. With full palate expression, it is clean, crisp, refreshing and elegant. Serve it well chilled as an aperitif with a cold crab dish and watch the crispness excite your palate.

THE 1986 GRAND MOUTON (\$9) will disprove those who say that Muscadet does not age. This wine is made from 60-year-old vines. As it matures, it lost some of its fresh, exuberant fruit, but it has built an appealing, finessful bottle bouquet. Its broad palate impression created by the sur lie aging technique remains fresh and alive. The vibrant acidity makes it a superb match for scallops in a light cream sauce accented with curry.

For all the Metaireau wines, a cream base for warm cuisine, or mayonnaise — plain or dill for a cold shellfish presentation takes the edge off the nervy acidity. Either cream or mayonnaise allows the wine to show its softer qualities, while remaining crisp and palate-cleansing.

Give a fig for dried variety grown in California valley

AP — Dried figs from California's San Joaquin Valley are tasty and versatile. They can be enjoyed as a snack or used in a variety of recipes.

The California Fig Advisory Board in Fresno, Calif., says that once for ounce, pound for pound, dried figs are nearly 80 percent higher in potassium than bananas and are a good source of calcium. Figs are cholesterol-free, almost fat-free and virtually sodium-free.

California figs are high in dietary fiber, especially pectin and other soluble fibers, and are comparatively low in calories, with less than 40 calories in a large fig.

To chop whole figs, snip off stems, put in a food processor or a blender. Chop to desired fineness. Use a small amount of flour or sugar called for in the recipes along with the whole figs for best results.

To chop by hand, use kitchen scissors or a sharp knife. Dip scissors or knife in hot water frequently to keep them from becoming sticky.

Some ideas for using whole figs: — FOR THE BROWN-BAGGER: Chop 3 figs coarsely, mix with 1/4 pint low-fat cottage cheese or plain yogurt. Keep chilled, and don't forget the spoon.

— FIGGY APPETIZER SPREAD: Combine 1/4 cup chopped, toasted almonds, 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard, 10 chopped figs with one 3-ounce package of cream cheese that has been thinned with 1 tablespoon

skimmed milk. Spread on crackers, bread or stuff celery sticks.

FIG FILLINGS: Silt and stuff with walnuts, almonds or pecans; peanut butter; plain or fruit; cream cheese; cheddar or jack cheese; chocolate chips; peanut chips or butter-scootch chips.

— BREAKFAST TREATS: Add

chopped figs to your favorite cold cereal or slice 3 figs into a glass bowl, add 3 tablespoons uncooked wheat or oatmeal, a dash of salt, 1/4 cup water. Cook uncovered on high (100 percent power) in the microwave oven for 2 minutes; stir, cook on high for 1 additional minute. Let stand for 1 minute.

FIG AND PEAR SALAD

2 tablespoons balsamic or red-wine vinegar
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1/4 cup virgin olive oil
Freshly ground pepper to taste
1 head butter lettuce, torn into bite-

size pieces

1 head radicchio lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces (optional)
4 pears, cored and sliced into thin wedges
2 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
1/4 cup California dried figs, chopped
1/4 cup walnuts, coarsely chopped and toasted

In a small bowl, stir together vinegar, lemon juice and mustard. With a whisk, slowly beat in oil until well blended. Whisk in pepper.

To serve, arrange lettuce on individual plates. Arrange pears in spoke fashion over lettuce. Pour on dressing. Sprinkle with feta cheese, figs and walnuts. Makes 6 servings.

Santa Fe sandwich a hot one

AP — This sandwich will bring your taste buds to attention. Hot pepper sauce and cilantro, a fresh herb popular in Southwestern cooking, add snap to plain mayonnaise.

SANTA FE SUBS
1/4 cup mayonnaise or salad dressing
1/4 cup snipped cilantro
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
Several dashes bottled hot pepper sauce
Four French rolls (7-to-8-inches long)
1/4 pound thinly sliced cooked beef
One 7-ounce jar roasted sweet red peppers, drained
One 4-ounce package Monterey Jack cheese with peppers, thinly sliced
1/4 cup sliced green onion

For sauce, in a small mixing bowl combine mayonnaise or salad dressing, cilantro, garlic powder and hot pepper sauce.

Slice tops from rolls; set aside. Scoop out insides of roll bottoms. Spread with half the sauce; top with half the beef, red pepper and remaining beef. Place on baking sheet. Cover loosely with foil. Bake in 375-degree oven 12 to 15 minutes or until cheese begins to melt. To serve, sprinkle green onion over cheese and cap with roll tops; cut in half. Makes 4 servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 580 cal., 38 g. pro., 36 g. carb., 31 g. fat, 97 mg. chol., 663 mg. sodium. U.S. RDA: 43 percent vit. A, 53 percent vit. C, 23 percent thiamine, 25 percent riboflavin, 27 percent niacin, 25 percent calcium, 23 percent iron.

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